Sports / Boxing

The Bobby Hunter story

"Me and this girl were doing a little shoving. Man got involved. Pushed up against him. He got mad, and I pulled out a knife and stabbed him."

Bobby Lee Hunter is remaking his world.

He has some help, but in the end what triumph he feels will belong to him alone. Bobby Lee Hunter is struggling quietly, trying to turn a soul-wrecking mistake into a hope, against odds that only his fellow inmates at Columbia's Manning Correctional Institute could truly understand.

His battle has not gone unnoticed. Newspapers have recorded his boxing conquests, ABC has televised his story, Sports Illustrated has taken note, and politicians have praised him. But only Hunter knows the feeling that lives deep inside and drives so hard.

For Hunter is fighting his way back to the outside by himself ... alone. The 22-year-old Black has been boxing just two years but has already won the National AAU Flyweight championship. He fought for the United States in last year's Pan American games. He has fought exhibitions in Great Britain and Russia. He has won 26 of 30 fights. He is now training for the trials preceding the summer Olympics in Munich. He has also killed a man.

And because he has killed he is now serving an 18-year sentence in Columbia for manslaughter, because one night about five years ago in a Charleston snack bar he lost his head and stabbed a man.

"Me and this girl were doing a little shoving," Hunter says. He talks in a quiet, subdued tone. "Man got involved. Pushed up against him. He got mad, and I pulled out a knife and stabbed him.

"He told the manager (of the store) he was all right. Then he didn't go to the hospital for 12 hours. He died of internal bleeding."

Hunter's face doesn't show emotion. What is done, is done. Perhaps it is painful, but he obliges and answers the questions.

We sit at a table in one of the recreation rooms at Manning Institute. In one corner is a mat and a hook for the punching bag Hunter trains on. In another corner sits a young inmate with his wife. She looks to be about 20. She has brought a cake and their little girl, who is perhaps three years old. The couple laugh, share the closeness of a kiss, and the little girl climbs in the chair.

Hunter is dressed in his grey prison trousers and a sport shirt. He is quite well-groomed. His 5-2 frame is muscle and sinew. His shoulders slope from the neck in a strong, casual way. He responds slowly to a question about how he felt when it was all over.

"I was pretty mad — at myself, the manager, the man in the store, the girl." And in 1967, he started his sentence, with that feeling. "I never thought I'd be able to go back outside.

"I was a little rough when I came here." He cracks a slight smile. "When I came in here I did a lot of fighting, you know. It went on for about 18 months."

Then one day, for whatever reason, Hunter picked up a pair of gloves and started boxing.

"At that time everything I did, I did on my own. I was self taught. Red Douglas really got me started on this. At that time he was the coach at the Columbia Correctional Institute. He got interested in me, and asked me if I wanted to go out into the street and start fighting."

The "street" Hunter explained, meant the outside. He said yes to the offer and in 1970 had his first fight at Ft. Jackson. He has been helped by Douglas, and others, Chris Hitopoules, Bill Jerry. But as Ray Satterfield, his guard on the trips and his friend, says, "The biggest thing to Bobby's success is himself. He's made up his mind he's gonna be a champion and there he is."

Satterfield came into Hunter's story in 1971, and he has stayed because Hunter wants him to.

"Bobby was already established when I met him. I had heard a lot about him and read about him."

Satterfield has joined us at the table now. He offers Hunter a cigarette, but Hunter declines.

Satterfield says he was asked if he wanted to accompany Hunter to the Pan American trials at Ft. Bragg, N. C., in June 1971. Someone had to go; inmates don't travel alone. So Satterfield went.

"Bobby has always asked for me to go with him (since then) and I appreciate it."

Satterfield comes through as modest, unassuming. His short hair is gray at 36. He is a native of Union County and got into prison work about a year and a half ago when 10 years of working in industry left him dissatisfied. "It's a good way to work with young people," he says.

Satterfield has a brother, Patrick, who works with the Department of Corrections, and it was his influence, Satterfield says, more than anything that made him decide to try it.

It is clear Hunter has made an impression on him. "I never knew anybody to work harder. I do believe if Bobby were on the outside, like most of the boys he fights, he'd be untouchable.

"He has given the other inmates incentive to work."

The problems Hunter has overcome have not been small ones. The funds are limited for such rehabilitation and so is the space. Hunter trains in the recreation room and in a cell. His roadwork is done around the compound.

"It is the only place Bobby has to run," Satterfield says. "The thing that impresses me about Bobby is he takes things as they come. Bobby has been exceptionally patient about these things. I've never known a young man to start with so little and put his heart and mind in it. He schedules his own training, and he knows what he needs to do.

"I don't believe I could do it under the circumstances. I don't believe I could force myself."

Satterfield shakes his head as if to say he wishes things were better. He smiles, almost ruefully.

"Can you imagine that?"

Hunter sits quietly while his friend talks. He is asked if it has been hard on him. He nods, "Yes."

But Hunter doesn't say anymore. He's the only one who really knows how hard he has had to fight. He sits quietly. He knows where he has been and what the old struggle was and how much it cost. Now he has a new struggle. It is one with direction, one that can carry him to the Olympics. It could win him a gold medal, and it perhaps might even win him a parole next year. It is possible. The fight has already taken him a long way from Charleston and that snack bar.

park morgan

" . . .'A hoodlum is a hoodlum . . .he's just got to be dealt with; it's the only thing he understands' . . ." ---Mooney Player

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ago. But as that issue has faded , another one -- perhaps closer to the heart of the matter -- rises to the surface. Most white parents know their children must go to school with black children but they want that to be the end of it -- "respect" for but no asscoiation with blacks. Bringing about a unitary society is something they want no part of.

Mooney Player extols the values of desegregation: "I, for one, went to an all-white public educational school and I got the hang cheated out of me -- cause when I was 18 years old, I didn't know how to live effectively in a black-white culture. I think desegregated schools are a must."

Player believes students can learn to live together in the schools and his concept of how people learn is demonstrated in "guidelines" for Deadline '72 members. Sketched out in roman numerals "I" through "IX", the short declarative sentences have the ring of the Ten Commandments:

"I. Censure rumors from our movement and deal with facts and opinions.

II. Avoid racial generalities.

III. Work in your area of influence to keep your friends and relatives in public education for one more year, Etc."

There were no questions or discussion of Deadline '72 at the end of Player's talk that Thursday night at Oak Ridge Club. Definitive statements left no room for such. Player was the coach, the leader, and questions on "Problems, Causes, Solutions, and Guidelines" as outlined in "Re-Deadline '72" might have seemed a challenge of authority and certainly would have been discourteous and a show of ignorance.

Player is an authority figure and a firm believer in "responsible adult control" in the schools. In his view, instructions are to be handed down from those in positions of leadership to those who are learning. There is no interchange that allows for mutual discovery by student and teacher. This position has earned him the nickname "Mr. Bully" among those students at Lower Richland and has especially grated on black students who are growing increasingly aware of black pride, black culture and the dominant white society's insensitivity to "black children's humanity."

Racial myths are crumbling and students often find their elders' advice silly when they compare it to their daily experiences. Confronted with this conflict, students often fail to show "proper respect" for teachers and sometimes put them in the position of either responding by using their authority over the students or delving into questions of human relations "not related to their subject matter." Some students , of course, take advantage of the situations for the sake of disrupting classes that bore them. Seperating the students with legitimate grievances from the "disrupters" is a problem District One is struggling with.

Deadline '72 complains of "so many boards, hearing groups, grievance lists, advisory groups, etc. that all of them stay hopelessly bogged i n red tape while trouble makers go uncorrected."

"A hoodlum is a hoodlum," Player says, "and he might come from a wealthy background or a poor background or a black or a white. But the important thing is if he's a hoodlum, he has to be dealt with as such and he's gonna have no respect for rhetoric or theory or philosophy or hearing groups or hearing boards. He's just got to be dealt with; it's the only thing he understands."

Player insists thaat local administrators ought to be empowered to deal with "hoodlums" and describes leadership on the local level as "bad, weak, timid and not very well supported." He says "Education in District One has flat sold out. Everybody knows it; few people have the courage to admit it." The buyer, Player claims, is M. Hayes Mizell, a District One school board member and a long-time advocate of school integration. Player was quoted in daily newspapers as saying the purpose of Deadline '72 is to elect "enough members to the school board to outvote Mizell."

Player says Mizell has "perpetuated the cause of the disadvantaged in an over-reactive way to the point that the advantaged child is leaving public education" and is "re-segregating schools at 90 miles an hour." Player's big point is "to re-establish public confidence in education" and he thinks that can be done by electing to the school board "people who want to give equal opportunity to advantaged and disadvantaged students." He says he is not qualified enough in curriculum to say how students in both categories can get equal opportunity and is less definite still on seperating students into the two groups:

"I'm going to say the educationally advantaged and the educationlly disadvantaged. It might be offensive if it went beyond that. I have no desire to offend anybody except people who foul up education -- like Mizell and some of these other people -- well, just say Mizell. And I have no quarrel with the educationally disadvantaged or the educationally advantage youngsters. Consequently, I don't want to pursue that."

Other people would. Black leaders have long maintained tha so-called "accelerated classes for the advanced student" somehow always end up lily-white, either as a result of blatant racism or selections based on testing that is geared to judge students on the basis of white middle class standards.

Player says one of Deadline '72's biggest problems is recruiting black people, though he maintains that both black and whites have been a part of the "wholesale pullout" from public schools. He sees "Educational Migration (EDMI) ' as a major threat t o public education but again he approaches the situation totally from the white perspective: "Real estate people can not sell a house in District One, as a rule, to people with children." If there is any widespread refusal on the part of blacks to buy houses because "there is no confidence in public education", it has escaped everyone except Player.

So Deadline '72, with Player at the helm, moves slowly and with whites. The group is committed to the worthwhile cause of re-establishing public support for the schools but apparently dismisses as non-supportive such groups as Concerned Citizens of Lower Richland and the Black Coalition for Justice in the schools. Deadline '72 is committed to desegregation but fears that interracial dating might occur and it is committed to order in the schools but distrusts student-run efforts that have been at least partially successful in establishing that order.

Deadline '72 is committed most of all to electing school board members who will support "courageous apprehension of hoodlums" by local administrators. Player says his group could "enthusiastically" support" 11 of the 17 candidates for the five trustees' post being vacated but he would not name them, though he did say the two students seeking the offices "would not be a factor in the election."

Mooney Player keeps his cards close to his chest. Concerning the number of members in Deadline '72 he says "because most of our membership comes from personal contact and they're turned in in groups of 100 and fifty and five and six and 90. I just have no idea. It depends on when you check the file." — But he added with a bit of coach's bravado, "We have enough people to make a hang of a showing at the polls."

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